



## Update on Snapper Grouper Amendments

November 2020

### *Red Snapper Seasons Modifications (Regulatory Amendment 33)*

During the March 2019 meeting, the Council discussed modifying the days of the week that are open to red snapper recreational harvest starting in 2020, should harvest be allowed, to maximize fishing opportunity in the event of bad weather. The Committee was concerned that limiting the recreational season to consecutive “weekends” during the summer months could increase the chances of losing an entire weekend to fishing opportunities for red snapper because of poor weather conditions. The Committee also expressed interest in having periodic review of how limited openings are working and providing the public an opportunity to provide feedback on the seasons. Additionally, the Council intends to explore changing the start dates for the commercial and recreational seasons to minimize fishing mortality when red snapper are spawning, and removing the minimum number of days requirement to allow harvest. The Council reviewed an option paper at the June 2019 meeting and approved the amendment for public hearings to be held in August 2019. The Council reviewed public comment in September 2019, removed two actions (modifying the start and the days of the week for the recreational sector), and selected preferred alternatives for the remaining two actions. In December 2019, the Council made modifications to the Purpose and Need and selected the no action alternative to change the start date for the commercial red snapper season. The Council approved the amendment for formal review. At the March 2020 meeting, SERO informed the Council that the 2020 red snapper recreational season would be three days IF Regulatory Amendment 33 were to be implemented before July 2020. The proposed rule published on May 14, 2020 with a comment period through June 15, 2020. During the June 2020 meeting, NMFS announced that the recreational season for red snapper in 2020 would be four days. The final rule was published on October 13, 2020 with an effective date of November 13, 2020.

### *SMZs in North and South Carolina (Regulatory Amendment 34)*

The process to designate SMZs around artificial reefs was established in the Snapper Grouper FMP in 1983 with the main intent being to “*create incentive to create artificial reefs and fish attraction devices that will increase biological production and/or create fishing opportunities that would not otherwise exist*”.

In March 2019, the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) and the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) submitted requests to the Council to designate artificial reefs located in the EEZ off those states as Special Management Zones. The NCDMF requested designation of 30 artificial reef sites in the EEZ off North Carolina. Fishing gear other than handline, rod and reel, and spear would be prohibited within the proposed SMZs. Further, harvest of snapper grouper species with spearfishing gear would be limited to the recreational bag limit for those species.

In South Carolina, 29 artificial reef sites in the EEZ have already been designated as SMZs. Four additional artificial reef sites have been established in recent years and the SCDNR has requested the

sites be designated as SMZs with the same restrictions on fishing gear as other SMZs, namely limiting angling activities to handheld hook and line gear and spearfishing gear (excluding powerheads). In addition, the use of fish traps, longlines, gill nets, and trawls would be prohibited, and harvest of snapper grouper species would be limited to the applicable recreational bag limits.

In June 2019 the Council directed staff to begin development of an amendment, with the intent to hold public hearings in the fall and consider the amendment for final approval in December 2019. At the September 2019 meeting, the Council revised the timeline for developing this amendment. Public scoping was held during fall 2019 and the Council reviewed public input and provided guidance to staff at the March 2020 meeting. The Council approved the amendment for public hearings that were held on May 4 and 5, 2020. At the June 2020 meeting the Council approved the amendment for formal review. The amendment was submitted to NMFS on August 11, 2020. A proposed rule for this amendment has not yet been published.

### *Wreckfish ITQ Program Modernization (Amendment 48)*

In September 2019, the Council reviewed the final version of the 2019 Wreckfish ITQ Review. They received a presentation that outlined work done since the June 2019 meeting and outlined the Conclusions and Recommendations from the review. The Council approved the review as written and directed staff to begin the develop a plan amendment in 2020 to modernize the Wreckfish ITQ Program and include actions that address all of the conclusions and recommendations from the Wreckfish ITQ Review that can be addressed through a plan amendment. At the September 2020 meeting, the Committee reviewed an options paper based on the conclusions and recommendations prepared by staff. The Council also directed that the goals and objectives approved in the 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery be included in the amendment as the new goals and objectives of the FMP. The Council also directed staff to hold a meeting of the Wreckfish ITQ shareholders and wholesale dealers prior to the December 2020 meeting to discuss the pending development of Amendment 48 to get their input. At their December meeting, the Council will be presented with the findings of that meeting, held on October 26, 2020. The amendment may be approved for scoping, which would likely take place in winter 2021.

### *For-Hire Electronic Reporting*

The Council began developing the amendment in 2015 and submitted it for formal review on March 4, 2017. The Council was notified on June 12, 2018, that the amendment was approved. Because of the ongoing pandemic, the effective date of regulations on the Atlantic was postponed to January 4, 2021. Regulations in the Gulf of Mexico addressing trip declaration and electronic logbook components of the program are expected to be effective on January 5, 2021. The effective date for the location tracking component of the final rule has not yet been announced.

The amendment implements the following:

- Weekly electronic reporting for charter vessels with a federal for-hire permit for South Atlantic snapper grouper species, Atlantic coastal migratory pelagics, or Atlantic dolphin and wahoo.
- Headboat vessels with a federal for-hire permit will continue to submit reports to the Southeast Region Headboat Survey but will be required to submit electronic fishing reports by Tuesday following a reporting week, rather than by Sunday.
- Charter fishermen must report information such as trip start and end dates and times, species kept and discarded, fishing location, depth fished, hours fished, and charter fee.
- Electronic reports from charter fishermen are due by Tuesday following the end of each reporting week, which runs from Monday through Sunday.
- Charter fishermen can report using their computer, smartphone, and tablets with access to the internet. Reporting must be through software approved by NOAA Fisheries (will be announced

on their website when available). <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/southeast/recreational-fishing/approved-software-and-hardware-southeast-hire-reporting-program>

- An owner or operator of a charter vessel or headboat that has been issued federal charter vessel/headboat permits for applicable fisheries in both the South Atlantic and the Gulf would be required to submit a report under the Gulf program's more stringent requirements, when the Gulf program is implemented. For more information see: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/gulf-mexico-modifications-charter-vessel-and-headboat-reporting-requirements>. Some of the approved software will satisfy reporting requirements for charter/headboat vessels permitted in the Greater Atlantic Region and those with HMS permits to avoid duplication.

### *Greater Amberjack Assessment/Allocations (Amendment 49)*

In June 2020, the Council received the results of SEDAR 59 for Greater Amberjack. Greater Amberjack were determined to be neither overfished nor undergoing overfishing. This amendment will consider modifications to management measures and sector allocations. The Council is scheduled to discuss this amendment at their December 2020 meeting.

### *Yellowtail Snapper Assessment/Allocations*

The Council is expected to receive the results of SEDAR 64 for Yellowtail Snapper in December 2020. This amendment will consider modifications to management measures and sector allocations.

### *Snowy Grouper Assessment/Allocations*

The Council is expected to receive the results of SEDAR 36 (Update) for Snowy Grouper in March 2021. This amendment will consider modifications to management measures and sector allocations.